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UNRAVELING SCHOOL LEADERSHIP: A SELF-STUDY IN BECOMING A
LEADER (131 pp.)

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Current contemporary discourse surrounding American education creates a context for educational leadership that values certain kinds of primarily external, behavioral leader traits. Systems of standardization and accountability perpetuate sociocultural and political appreciation for qualities such as interpretation of data, raising student achievement, and producing tangible results. Ignored in this discourse is the continued professional development of educational leaders through critical reflection of the self and one's practices.

This work is grounded in Palmer's (1998) belief that being an educator is moral and ethical work necessitating self-understanding. To this end, the focus was to explore how one educational leader, myself, embarked on a journey toward self-understanding using self-study methodologies and Pinar's (2012) narrative *currere*. I begin with an exploration of the leader qualities I envisioned for myself as a new Curriculum Director in a rural Midwestern school district, which included having a democratic disposition and a commitment to critical reflection. My vision of a democratic leader was one who "recognizes and taps the collective intelligence and energy within an organization to generate productive growth and effective solutions" (Klimek, Ritzenhein, & Sullivan, 2008, p. 2), and my understanding of critical reflection was as "a process of inquiry

involving practitioners in trying to discover, and research, the assumptions that frame how they work” (Brookfield, 1998, p. 197). In addition, I was interested in exploring theoretical underpinnings of integral leadership (Putz & Raynor, 2005; Volckmann, 2012) and reconstructive postmodernism (Kegan, 1994) and the ways in which these theories were the basis for my understandings of adult development and leadership. The study spanned five months and resulted in uncovering several influences that created the context for my professional work. These included internal influences such as personal beliefs, my need to create a leading role for myself, trying to balance leading role and self, and relating as an individual to the collective, as well as one external influence based in how others defined my role responsibilities.

Through a personal study of leader identity, I aimed to present one method through which educational leaders could further their own professional development in a sociocultural and political discourse that values external behaviors over internal understandings.